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ABSTRACT

The "American Review of History and Politics and General Repository of Literature and State Papers" ("American Review") was the first quarterly magazine published in the United States (1811-12). Its editor, Robert Walsh, was considered to be one of the leading men of letters of his era. Located in Philadelphia, the 26-year-old Walsh developed a publication to report regularly on the activities of governments in Europe, particularly in Great Britain. His quarterly was modeled after the popular British periodicals, such as the "Annual Register of England," and the articles concerned matters such as the political struggle between France and Great Britain and also gave attention to President James Monroe and the United States Congress. The publication also contained much nonpolitical material. Walsh used book reviews, which took the form of lengthy essays: speeches: and essays on history, society, geography, and science. Walsh wrote most of the material himself, but did use contributors when they made manuscripts available. Walsh was forced to cease publication of his magazine after only eight issues because of unfavorable political conditions (his pro-English position was unpopular in 1812), lack of contributors, and few subscribers. (Author/FL)

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ROBERT WALSH'S AMERICAN REVIEW:

AMERICA'S FIRST QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

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ROBERT WALSH'S AMERICAN REVIEW:

AMERICA'S FIRST QUARTERLY

Almost twenty-five years after Robert Walsh, Jr., had discontinued publication of the American Review of History and Politics, the first standard quarterly review in the United States,[1] Edgar Allen Poe praised the writing of Walsh, stating in the Southern Literary Messenger:

> Having read . . . with much attention and pleasure, we are prepared to admit that the author is one of the finest writers, one of the most accomplished scholars, and when not in too great a hurry, one of the most accurate thinkers in the country.[2]

Poe was addressing the abilities of Walsh upon the publication of a new book authored by Walsh, who was one of the leading men of letters of his era, in 1836. A quarter of a century earlier Walsh began publication of his first, and the young nation's first quarterly magazine, formally entitled the American Review of History and Politics and General Repository of Literature and State Papers. The venture lasted through two years and just eight issues from January 1811 until October 1812. Its regular interval of publication over the two years made it the first American quarterly magazine. Furthermore, the American Review merits focus because the publication has received virtually no consideration by historians. Despite discussions of Walsh's life and his literary contributions in general, his work devoted to editing the first American quarterly magazine has not been studied in depth.[3] Walsh, 26 years old when he began the review, was deliberate and consistent in his work as the editor, clearly stating his publication's goals in the prospectus of the journal in the first issue and adhering to them until he was forced to discontinue publication after just two years.

Walsh (1784-1859), was born in Baltimore, son of an Irish Catholic and a Pennsylvania Quaker,[4] and became interested in Franco-American and British politics in his early travels. He studied in France and England, and learned law in Baltimore under Robert Goodloe Harper, a Federalist aristocrat. For a while, Walsh was the secretary to William Pinkney, U.S. foreign minister to England.[5] The influence of Harper and Pinkney led Walsh to become a staunch Federalist. Walsh visited Philadelphia in 1809, gaining attention by publishing a 153-page book entitled, "A Letter on the Genius and Dispositions of the French Grovernment."[6] Contrary to public sentiment, Walsh was hostile in the book toward Louis Napolean, and Walsh favored U.S. alliance with England, a reason the book was republished in different editions and later reprinted in part and favorably discussed in England in The Edinburgh Review and London Quarterly Review.[7] Because of his views, many of Walsh's later writings were reprinted in England as well, including some of his commentary in the American Review.

Returning to Baltimore, Walsh attempted to practice law. But being handicapped by partial deafness,[8] he turned to editing The American Register, or General Repository of History, Politics, and Science back in Philadelphia in the spring of 1810.[9] But his tenure as editor was quite brief. Walsh, looking for an outlet of his own for his political writing, founded the American Review in the fall of the same year in Philadelphia, ceasing his association with the American Register after just two volumes.[10] Throughout October and to mid November, 1810, he worked to plan the journal, and by January, 1811, the first issue of the American Review appeared.

In assuming the need for a new political publication patterned

after the English magazines, Walsh's prospectus of the American Review explained the primary purposes which led Walsh to establish his own magazine. He wrote:

> It will embrace a review of the public occurrences of Europe, and of our own relations with that quarter of the globe, ---an examination of the parliamentary history and domestic policy of this country, ---an inquiry into the merits of foreign and native productions . . . original essays, and selections in every department of literature; ---an application of the principles of political economy to the peculiar circumstances of the United States, ---and a collection of the state papers . . . fitted to illustrate and to confirm the facts and opinions advanced in the in the historical and political articles.
>
> The chief ends of this miscellany . . . are the propagation of sound political doctrines, and the direction and improvement of the literary taste of the American people. It has been thought adviseable to adopt a plan of a nature so comprehensive as to exclude nothing . . . .[11]

Lochemes and Woodall note a letter from Walsh to his sister, Eliza, dated October 24, 1810, in which Walsh expresses his intention to make the publication similar to journals from England and in which his financial arrangements are disclosed:

> The nature of the work which I am about to undertake is to be analogous in some degree to the Annual Register of England. It will be published either Quarterly or Semi-Annually, and will consist of a general review of politics & literature, of literary selections, of state papers & scientific memoirs. By this plan I shall be called upon to write about sixty pages of original matter for each number---the remainder will be a business of selection & my opportunities of obtaining materials are better than those of anybody else. My emolument will be about four thousand dollars per annum should two thousand subscribers be obtained & less in proportion or greater as the case may be.[12]

John Neal, writing in a series of articles on American writers which appeared in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in 1824, reported that Walsh was financially more successful than anticipated:

> When Robert Walsh, Jr., Esquire, was the Jupiter of the American Olympus, (having been puffed in the Edinboro for some blackguard thunder and lightening about Napolean, whose character neither party ever understood), he was

> employed by a confederacy of publishers, to edit a quarterly Journal. They paid nothing to the contributors, of whom Walsh made continual use -- spared no trouble -- stuck at nothing in the experiment; paid him 1500 dollars (£340) a number -- and failed of course.[13]

Soon after his letter to his sister, Walsh decided on a quarterly publication and stated that it allowed "an interval of time . . . sufficient for the exercise of care and discrimination in the composition, the selection, and the arrangement of materials."[14] The journal was published dated January, March, July, and October.

The major political concern which Walsh continually expressed was the struggle between France and Great Britain. Walsh took it as an objective "to furnish the readers of this miscellany with correct views of the true condition and policy . . . (in France and Great Britain)."[15] Furthermore, he promised to monitor the proceedings of the Congress with care. He argued that the entire situation in Europe was of melancholy character and it was necessary toclosely observe the affairs of state at home.

Walsh, a keen watchdog of the reign of Louis Napolean, considered the French government the leading political issue of the period. He wrote in the prospectus:

> Although the repetition of enormous crimes since the commencement of the French revolution, is calculated to render the present generation callous to any excesses of profligate power, we are not without a numerous body composing the best and most efficient class of citizens, who are justly shocked at the horrible depravity of the conduct and views of the Imperial government of France, particularly as they are exemplified in the cases of Spain and Holland . . . . . .
> . . . . . .
> It shall be one of the leading objects of this journal to unfold the whole content of those dangers (of the French), and to administer in every form . . . the strongest antidotes to that blind security, which we consider as the capital evil, and the most distemper of the state.[16]

In addition to the strong focus on politics, literature was of

similar high interest to Walsh. He felt there was an overwhelming need for the promotion of culture and the arts, particularly the literature of the new nation. He discredited the criticisms of the writers of Europe, and suggested in his patriotic manner that Americans take advantage of their own literary resources.[17] Walsh asked for contributions from men of letters of America in the first number. He emphasized, in lengthy prose characteristic of his style, that the statesmen and eminent authors of Europe frequently contributed to leading European journals and Americans should do the same.[18]

The American Review was published under four conditions which were announced in the first number. These included that (1) the work be published on good paper, in octavo, with four numbers annually of at least two hundred pages; (2) the first number be published January 1, 1811; (3) the price of subscription set at six dollars per year; and (4) the distant subscribers pay in advance. Walsh achieved widespread geographic distribution of the magazine at the outset. Booksellers in major cities of the United States sold copies in such locales as Boston; Portland, Maine; Middlebury, Vermont; Albany, New York; Pittsburgh, Baltimore; and Petersburg, Virginia. Other cities during the two years of publication, included Lexington, Kentucky, then on the western frontier of the developing nation.[19]

Walsh wrote almost all of the American Review. Woodall stated that the new publication was received with mixed feelings, depending upon political views of the reader. Federalists were positive; opponents attacked the content.[20] It is unclear exactly how much Walsh did write, but as Neal noted in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine a dozen years after the suspension of the American Review, Walsh made use of many contribu-

tors without paying them,[21] a normal practice for the period. There are very few author credits in the eight issues; Walsh's name, ironically does not appear anywhere in the two years of journals.

Walsh immediately approached the French question in his journal. In the first and fourth numbers are extensive discussions of the "past and present relations of France and the United States."[22] The first issue's leading article on Napolean required eighty-eight pages while the second, although shorter, encompasse fifty-six pages. The lengthy treatments were, however, typical of Walsh's approach to editing the journal. Walsh also published a continuing series of letters written by prominent persons concerning France, Great Britain, and the United States.[23]

Despite this emphasis, still other articles on foreign political activity were published. Walsh published such items as the entire French commercial code,[24] a sketch of the French military system,[25] a book review of a Napolean biography,[26] as well as a series of French state papers.

One of the best received articles in his first issue, Lochemes observed, was a review of the "Works of Alexander Hamilton." She quotes author Washington Irving as stating that Walsh's writing on Hamilton's work is masterly.[27] The evaluation of the multi-volume publication of Hamilton was too lengthy to produce in one part, and was continued in the second issue of the review.

Walsh also used speeches as content for his review. He reprinted many political statements by prominent statesmen, both in the United States and Europe. For example, in the issue of July, 1811, Walsh chose to publish two speeches by members of the British parliament. He

explained:

> We republish entire, for the instruction of our readers, the speeches of Mr. Perceval and Mr. Foster, the Chancellors of the English and Irish Exchequers, on the opening of the Budgets in the British Parliament, on the seventeenth of May last (1811). They furnish the most ample and authentic information concerning the financial concerns of the United Kingdom. The statements of Mr. Perceval are of the highest importance, and of permanent value. The propriety of giving them a place in this work is too obvious to require a comment.[28]

Besides politics, subjects such as history and literature were not forgotten. There were published essays and reviews on diverse topics such as agriculture and rural living, chemistry, geography, philosophy, and man. Literature was discussed primarily through reviews of recent English and French books, with two to three lengthy reviews per issue. In these reviews, the authors were quite direct in expressing opinions of the new works. Walsh called one collection of American poetry, "Hubert and Ellen, with other Poems," "an object of uncommon interest," simply because it was the product of an American author, Lucius M. Sargent.[29]

The first issue of the American Review presented an entire section, representing about half of its total entries, devoted to foreign literature. However, the foreign literature concentration seemed to diminish as the number of journals published increased.[30] There is a significant number of personal memoirs reviewed. For example, there is a review of "Memoirs of the political and private life of James Caulfield, earl of Carlemont, Knight of St. Patrick," a book written by Francis Hardy. Another review of this same variety is "Memoirs and letters of Marecshal, Prince de Ligne, of Vienna."[31]

A sampling of the material outside of politics, history, and literature included geography and science essays. In the first number Walsh provided readers with a sketch of Palestine,[32] while in a later

number he published a review of Dr. Edward D. Clarke's book recounting his travels in Russia, Tartary, and Turkey.[33] The last number included a review of a book on Iceland in 1809 by Sir George S. Mackenzie.[34] Chemistry was closely examined in a report of the National Institute at Paris on the voltaic battery.[35] An amusing yet educational article was a review of "Memoirs of the Philadelphia Society for promoting Agriculture."[36] The review discussed short essays by society members on almost every imaginable aspect of husbandry and rural affairs.

A study of women in 1812 is contained in an essay, "On the Condition and Character of Women in different countries and ages," from Card's Literary Recreations.[37] This piece traced the history of man's treatment of women from the ancient Greek period through contemporary 1812. A serious discussion on the "Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species,"[38] a very early sociological and medical analysis of the differences in the European and the Negro, was also published. In it, the author disputes the hypotheses of Dr. Samuel Smith, then president at Princeton College, who argued that Negroes are simply dark-skinned Europeans. The unnamed reviewer argued that the hypothesis cannot be accepted for reasons of religious and logical origins.[39]

Much of the American Review political content was published in the form of reprinted state papers. The specific appendices approach lengths equal to the texts of the journals, far exceeding one hundred pages. The content of these sections is primarily papers, letters, and speeches of President James Monroe; French codes, state papers, and Louis Napolean's speeches are also included; correspondence between government officials and leading citizens is included; and economic

summaries of recent fiscal years are reprinted in the review.

Walsh's emphasis on state affairs between the United States and France cannot be discounted. The young nation plotted its foreign relations course cautiously. The topic was Walsh's primary objective, and his literary intentions suffered because of it in at least one issue. He explains to readers in the January, 1812 issue:

> Some original matter of considerable interest and value, has been purposely excluded from the present number, in order to allow place for the documents accompanying the President's message, which as state papers, are too important to be overlooked, and which it was thought preferrable to publish in one body.[40]

However, Walsh earnestly requested the contributions of his literary colleagues of the nation, including his mentor, Robert Goodloe Harper. Reaction is not recorded. In one "advertisment," Walsh wrote on May 2, 1812:

> Although a single individual might not find it too oppressive a task, to furnish alone the materials of the work upon the present plan --- this mode of proceeding would defeat one of the principles for which it was instituted and prove fatiguing to the public, who require not only a variety in choice of topics, but that kind of variety, which results from division of labor among several hands. The literary men of the country are therefore requested to contribute their aid, particularly by the discussion of subjects of general and permanent interest.[41]

Walsh was forced to cease publication of his magazine for several reasons beyond the lack of contributor support. Federalism was failing, and Walsh was losing his public following. Another reason was diplomatic, with the War of 1812 at the doorstep. Walsh, a pro-English politician, found few subscribers to accept his ideas, despite the fact that the American Review was reprinted in London. Walsh also suffered problems with his publishers, William P. Farrand and Charles F. Nicholas, both of Philadelphia.[42] Walsh described the difficulty in publishing his final issue:

Materials for the present Number of this Journal, were

> prepared in the month of October last, and then tendered to the publishers . . . . Owing, however, it may be presumed, to their insolvency, nothing was done by them towards printing the Number, and thus fulfilling their engagement with the Subscribers. That the latter might not be losers by this omission, the Editor himself, although not bound to do more than furnish the manuscript, has had it put to press, and now distributes it, as early as circumstances would permit. Whatever suitable arrangements can be made for the regulation of mechanical details, the work will be issued under his own immediate inspection, and upon an improved plan in all respects. Literary contributions are again solicited.[43]

Because of the lack of sufficient support both from contributors and subscribers,[44] the American Review suffered in the end from a severe lack of business prosperity. It was simply not profitable, perhaps indirectly due to Walsh's own high salary per issue.

After closing down the American Review, Walsh founded another periodical, the American Register, or Summary Review of History, Politics, and Literature, in 1817. Later, he published several essays and books during the remainder of his career, including Didactics: Social, Literary, and Political, which Poe reviewed in 1836.[46] Walsh also earned a reputation as an educator, serving as an English professor at a number of institutions of learning.

Among his journal efforts after the American Register was the National Gazette and Literary Register, started in 1819. He also revived the American Review in 1827 in the name American Quarterly Review. His second effort was more successful in longevity than the original, running ten years until 1837.[47] Poor health forced the 53-year-old Walsh to retire at the end of that year, and he permanently settled, interestingly, in Paris, France.[48]

Footnotes

[1]Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines 1741-1850 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1930), p. 271.

[2](Edgar Allen Poe), "Walsh's Didactics," Southern Literary Messenger, II (May, 1836), p. 399.

[3]For example, see Guy Ramon Woodall, "Robert Walsh, Jr., As Editor And Literary Critic: 1797-1836," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1966. Woodall's discussion of Walsh's work in editing the American Review is the most thorough in the literature. Other scholarly work on Walsh has been cited below.

[4]Richard J. Purcell, "Robert Walsh," in Allen Johnson, ed. Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XIX (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929) p. 391.

[5]Sister M. Frederick Lochemes, Robert Walsh: His Story (Washington, D.C., dissertation published by The Catholic University of America Press, 1941), p. 42.

[6]Ibid, pp. 57-58, 62.

[7]The Edinburgh Review, XVI, No. 1 (April, 1810); London Quarterly Review, III No. 337 (May, 1810). According to the British Museum General Catalog of Printed Books, 1964, the letter was published in at least nine English editions, plus translations into French (1810) and Italian (1811).

[8]Mott, American Magazines, p. 271; See also Woodall, Robert Walsh, p. 93n., p. 394.

[9]Lochemes, Robert Walsh, pp. 60, 68.

[10]Ibid, pp. 68-69; Woodall, Robert Walsh, p. 92.

[11]Robert Walsh, ed. American Review of History and Politics, I, No. 1, p. i.

[12]Lochemes, Robert Walsh, pp. 66-67; Woodall, Robert Walsh, p. 92.

[13]John Neal, "American Writers, No. II," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XVI, (October, 1824), p. 422n.

[14]Walsh, American Review, I, No. 1, p. ii.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid, p. ix.

[17]Ibid, p. v.

[18]Ibid, pp. vi-vii.

[19]Ibid, p. xi.

[20]Woodall, Robert Walsh, p. 118.

[21]John Neal, "American Writers," p. 422n. It was practice during the period not to pay contributors. Contributors simply did not seek nor expect remuneration.

[22]Walsh, American Review, I, No. 1, pp. 1-88; II, No. 2, pp. 187-243.

[23]Ibid, I, No. I, pp. 110-65; No. 2, pp. 297-354; III, No. 1, pp. 161-220.

[24]Ibid, II, No. 2, appendix pp. 91-205.

[25]Ibid, III, No. 1, pp. 121-60.

[26]Ibid, IV, No. 1, pp. 77-120.

[27]Lochemes, Robert Walsh, pp. 69-70.

[28]Walsh, American Review, II, No. 1, p. 172.

[29]Ibid, IV, No. 2, p. 245. Woodall said dependency on foreign literature was not uncommon. He wrote, ". . . the scarcity of native productions had compelled Walsh to look abroad for books tc criticize, and since this was so (it) was doubted that the work would serve a useful purpose because foreign publications had already been so masterfully reviewed in England." (p. 103).

[30]Most of the literary reviews were short of new material, rather they were long on quotations from other reviews and from the books themselves, Woodall observed (p. 103).

[31]Ibid, II, No. 1, pp. 102-27; Ibid, II, No. 2, pp. 296-310. Capitalization and other style peculiarities are Walsh's own on all textual citations.

[32]Ibid, I, No. 1, pp. 89-103.

[33]Ibid, III, No. 1, pp. 70-120.

[34]Ibid, IV, No. 2, pp. 284-305.

[35]Ibid, II, No. 2, pp. 324-58.

[36]Ibid, No. 1, pp. 78-101.

[37]Ibid, IV, No. 2, pp. 262-83.

[38]Ibid, II, No. 1, pp. 128-66.

[39]Ibid, p. 166.

[40]Ibid, II, No. 1, n. page.

[41]Ibid, III, No. 2, p. iii.

[42]Ibid, IV, No. 2, p. 105.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Circulation figures vary considerably. Lochemes said circulation did not reach the 2,000 subscribers Walsh sought (p. 72). Other estimates cited by Woodall include a low of just 50 names on the subscriber list when the first issue was printed, and a high of 3,000 at the end of the first year (pp. 122-23).

[45]Mott, American Magazines, p. 272; Lochemes, Robert Walsh, p. 72.

[46]Among the books written by Robert Walsh which are listed in The National Union Catalog (1942-72) and Library of Congress Catalog of Printed Cards (1946) are An Appeal from the Judgments of Great Britain Respecting the United States of America (1819); Biographical Sketch of Andrew Jackson, (1828); Correspondence Respecting Russia Between Robert Goodloe Harper, esq., and Robert Walsh, jun., (1813); An Inquiry Into the Past and Present Relations of France and the United States of America (1811); Notes on the American Constitution (1849). There were three other Walsh books, for a total of seven: Free Remarks on the Spirit of the Federal Government, and the Obligations of the Union Respecting the Exclusion of Slavery from the Territories and the New States (1819) and, as mentioned above, Didactics: Social, Literary and Political, in two volumes (1836), and A Letter on the Genius and Dispositions of the French Government (1810).

[47]Webster's Biographical Dictionary, (Springfield, Mass.: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1948), p.1539. Lochemes, Robert Walsh, p. 138.

[48]Lochemes, Robert Walsh, pp. 150, 180-81; see also Guy R. Woodall, "Robert Walsh in France," Maryland Historical Magazine, 71, No. 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 86-92.